

Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

20 January 1984

EL SALVADOR: DEALING WITH DEATH SQUADS [REDACTED]

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Summary

We believe efforts by the civilian government and the military high command to crack down on rightwing violence have made little progress and have been aimed almost exclusively at placating Washington. Salvadoran officials understandably feel uneasy about openly confronting rightwing extremists; death threats and other forms of intimidation against national leaders are commonplace, and often are carried out. Defense Minister Vides--whose room to maneuver is limited--appears both personally disinclined and professionally unable to effect a major cleanup within the armed forces any time soon. [REDACTED]

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Palliative Response

Since December, the response of the government and military leaders to the problem of rightwing violence has been mainly verbal. For the past several weeks, government officials have publicly denounced death squads, and military leaders have pledged in the local press to punish human rights offenders

This memorandum was requested by Vice-President Bush. It was prepared by [REDACTED] ALA, and was coordinated with the National Intelligence Officer and the Directorate of Operations. It contains information available as of 20 January 1984. Questions and comments are welcome and should be addressed to Chief, Middle America-Caribbean Division, ALA, [REDACTED]

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[redacted]

within the armed forces. Subordinate officers also have received lectures on avoiding involvement with rightwing terrorist organizations. [redacted]

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[redacted] policy meetings were held by senior military officers on 12 December to discuss "requirements" presented by Vice President Bush during his visit to San Salvador. Consensus was reached that a few unsavory officers identified by US officials would be transferred and that a military committee would be appointed to investigate abuses within the armed forces. [redacted]

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Concrete Action

Two mid-level police intelligence officers have been transferred to diplomatic posts overseas. This gesture is offset, however, by their replacement with ultrarightist officers, one of whom is a documented leader of a police death squad. Moreover, in the course of recent general orders, several other notorious rightwing extremists have been assigned to prestigious commands. These include Lieutenant Colonels Moran, Zepeda, Zacapa, Ponce, and Staben--all close associates of ultrarightist standard-bearer Roberto D'Aubuisson and his Nationalist Republican Alliance. [redacted]

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The military has reluctantly followed through on US demands to detain Captain Eduardo Avila, suspected of helping to arrange the murders of two US labor advisers in January 1981. Avila is temporarily being held on charges stemming from his being on self-imposed inactive duty for the past 18 months--a vague form of AWOL. [redacted]

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Avila's uncle--a Supreme Court Judge--has manipulated the legal process to protect his nephew, and Salvadoran authorities claim that more serious charges cannot now be legally brought against Avila. [redacted]

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Nevertheless, the US Embassy in Costa Rica reports that the government there has sent documentation to El Salvador charging Avila with terrorist activities in 1982, when he served as an attache in San Jose. US officials hope that these new charges will enable Salvadoran authorities to hold Avila long enough for the murder case against him to be developed or until he agrees to testify against his accomplices. [redacted]

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Meanwhile, an ad hoc investigative team has been set up by Defense Minister Vides to oversee reports of abuses within the armed forces. Nevertheless, the team leader, Captain Arango of the National Guard, is a cohort of former Major D'Aubuisson. In 1979, Arango reportedly was a leader of the notorious White Warriors Union--a death squad that specialized in eliminating members of the Catholic clergy. [REDACTED]

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General Vides has requested US aid to help form a bona fide commission to investigate both rightwing and leftwing terrorist groups. He and other military officers also reportedly have told some of D'Aubuisson's civilian aides to leave the country or face future investigations into their alleged death squad activities. For the moment, however, D'Aubuisson's civilian henchmen have rejected such threats and have made clear that they intend to remain in El Salvador. [REDACTED]

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SUBJECT: EL SALVADOR: DEALING WITH DEATH SQUADS [REDACTED]

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DDI/ALA/MCD/CA/ [REDACTED] (20 January 1984)

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- 1 - Cy cabled to Amb. Pickering
- 1 - Hugh Montgomery, State
- 1 - Constantine Menges, NSC
- 1 - Ambassador Motley, State

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Directorate of Intelligence
Office of African and Latin American Analysis

23 January 1984

NOTE FOR: Mr. Hugh Montgomery
Director, Bureau of Intelligence
and Research
Department of State

Hugh:

Attached for your information is our assessment of efforts by the Salvadoran military government and high command to crack down on right wing violence. Vice President Bush asked us to do this assessment for him. After reading it, he asked that I send copies to Ambassador Pickering and Tony Motley. I thought you would be interested as well.

Director

Attachment:
As stated

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Directorate of Intelligence
Office of African and Latin American Analysis

23 January 1984

NOTE FOR: Ambassador Langhorne A. Motley
Assistant Secretary of State for
Inter-American Affairs

Tony:

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Director

Attachment:
As stated

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Directorate of Intelligence
Office of African and Latin American Analysis

23 January 1984

NOTE FOR: Dr. Constantine Menges
Senior Staff Member, Inter-America
National Security Council

Constantine:

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